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Father Jogues at the lake of the Holy Sacrament

Benjamin Franklin
DeCosta

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Father Fogues

At the Lake of the Holy Sacrament

AN EPISODE

By B. F. De Costa

Author of "LAKE GEORGE, ITS SCENES AND CHARACTERISTICS."

Fifty Copies Reprinted from the
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The Author



Father Jogues at the Lake of the Holy Sacrament.

BY WILLIAM HICKLING.

(B. F. DE COSTA.)

Laudato si, mi Signore, por sor acqua

La quale è multo utile et humele et pretioso et casta.

—*St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun.*

THE beautiful inland sea now popularly known as "Lake George," was originally named *Lac du S. Sacrement* by the great martyr missionary to the Mohawks, the Rev. Isaac Jogues, S.J. On the eve of the festival of *Corpus Christi*, the Father arrived at the outlet or northern end of this most picturesque water, when on his way to accomplish a mission attended with peril, yet nevertheless most dear to his heart. His immediate object was, to conclude a peace between the French in Canada under Governor Montmagny and the Mohawk Indians, amongst whom he purposed, later, to take up missionary work. He passed the night where he first reached the lake. The next morning, May 29, 1646, he named the lake while the Church throughout all the world was celebrating the great feast, and then started to travel afoot southward to the Mohawk castles, where councils were held under "The Great Pine Tree." He doubtless followed the known Indian trail, and, getting well into the valley, passed near Johnstown and Fonda, reaching Tribes' Hill, which then must have been a beautiful and romantic situation, by the way of Albany and the present Auriesville; little

dreaming that one day his shrine would be set up there, and that thousands of devout Catholics two hundred and fifty-four years later would be making pilgrimages and offering their prayers at this place.

Reaching the Mohawk country in safety, he met the heads of the tribes in council and concluded the peace, the French and the Indians exchanging presents, the latter receiving many strings of enameled porcelain beads, which they valued highly.

Leaving with the people a box containing, probably, small articles for altar use when he should return as a missionary, Father Jogues and his party started on their return June 16th, heavy laden, carrying provisions and baggage, the account says, like Arabic horses. On their return, they struck the head or south end of the Lake of the Holy Sacrament, and there delayed while the Indians built canoes. In these they embarked and paddled the entire length of the lake, reaching the outlet, where first they spent the night on the lake. Here they encamped again, and the next day, probably, the eve of the festival of St. John the Baptist, making the portage, they re-embarked on Lake Champlain and reached the first French settlement about the 27th of the same month.

Father Jogues was the first white man and the first Jesuit, then known by the Indians as the "Black Robe," who visited the lake. Champlain, in 1609, saw the *Carrillon*, but there is nothing to indicate that he ever viewed this unequaled body of water, which exclusively bore the name given by Father Jogues during one hundred and eleven years, the lake being generally regarded as of high strategic value and the gateway to Canada.

Just one century after it was named by Father Jogues, it was visited by General William Johnston, of Johnstown, who says :

"I went on Lake Saint Sacrament in 1746, when, to show the enemy [the French] the strength of our Indian alliance, I desired each nation to affix their symbol to a tree to alarm the French. The Oneidas put up a stone, which they painted red." (*Doc. Hist. N. Y.*, Vol. IV., p. 271.) August 28, 1753.

General Johnston was again at the lake, with his English army, for a campaign against the French, and changed its name to "Lake George," in honor of the king. This is to be deeply regretted, and, upon the whole, it may perhaps be regarded as an act of vandalism. The water of this mountain-born lake, by its singular purity, has been valued for baptismal use. Also, by its transparent purity, it symbolized the saintly life and stainless character of the Martyr. No circumstance, however, could have justified the change of name, and, as "The Lake of the Holy Sacrament," this exquisite sheet of crystal, which recalls the Sea of Glass before the Throne, will ever be remembered by truly Catholic souls. The name applied to it by Cooper, "The Horicon," was an invention, as, later in life, the novelist confessed.

The piece of verse herewith given is simply an episode of an extended work composed in 1868, devoted to the history, legends and antiquities of the Lake of the Holy Sacrament. The work was submitted at the time to a Protestant friend and critic by whom it was viewed unfavorably. Consequently it was laid aside, and remained almost forgotten until the present year; when, on looking through the manuscript, the author was struck by the sacramental character of its teaching, altogether un-Protestant, indicating what appeared to be the tone of his mind at the remote period of 1868 when he was not yet a Catholic. His interest was, therefore, excited afresh; while the particular portion now submitted also interested some of his Catholic friends, who suggested its publication. If he were attempting a similar task at the present time, he would, no doubt, employ more varied measures; yet he nevertheless allows this effort of years long ago to stand in its original form, thinking that the reader may bear with any infelicity he may discover for the sake of the subject.

Those familiar with the history of the sainted Jogues will readily perceive where history ends and fancy begins; though in the exercise of the imagination, the author has kept within the limits prescribed by the character of the martyr.

Father Jogues was pre-eminently a lover of nature, and must have been profoundly impressed by the unequalled

beauty of the Lake of the Holy Sacrament, as he paddled in his light canoe over its entire extent, from Diamond Island to the Rapids, the sounding Carrillon, where the waters make their splendid plunge, escaping into Lake Champlain. At the Lake the visitor often recalls the lines of Newman :

"A sea before
The throne is spread; its pure, still glass
Pictures all earth-scenes as they pass;"

And exclaims with St. Francis of Assisi :

"By Sister Water, O my Lord! Thou art praised."

In his first captivity among the Mohawks, Father Jogues compared himself to "St. Bernard, a disciple of the trees of the forest," saying: "I had formed a large Cross on a majestic tree, by stripping off the bark, and at its foot I spent almost the whole day with my God." (N. Y. Hist. Coll., 1857.)

In acknowledging the benefits derived from the splendid American forests, which spoke to his soul with many voices, he could say *experto crede* with Bernard. Like one also in the Forest of Arden, Father Jogues in the wilderness of Lake Saint Sacrament found "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks and good in everything." On the Lake the Canticle of the Sun is always timely, its spirit being in entire harmony with the genius of this rare body of crystal.

Lake of the Holy Sacrament.

Where springs the Hudson 'midst a tranquil vale,
Whose verdant forests fragrant airs exhale,
Its current dreaming of the distant sea,
Though still soft lapsing past the inland lea;
And where, empurpled, in the evening skies,
The Adirondacks in their grandeur rise,
In that fair region where no rude alarm
Disturbs the magic of the sylvan charm,
A deep lake shimmers whose weird beauty seems
The grand creation of bright Summer dreams.

A sky-born water fed by sparkling rills,
It lies encradled 'mid the ancient hills,
Whose verdant summits, clear reflected, rest
In sweet effulgence on its glassy breast.
Long ages perished ere a human eye
Surveyed the mountain in its majesty,
Or human bosom felt a kindred glow
With morning blushing on the wave below.
Then round the lakeside, in keen quest of prey,
The bear in silence took his sullen way,
And stealthy panthers watched the antlered stag,
Or drove him headlong from the cruel crag.
The wolf's fierce challenge rang around the shore,
In echoed answer to the torrent's roar,
And eagles wheeling o'er the cliffs on high,
Screamed weird responses to the loon's lone cry.
Thus years rolled onward, sunsets died away,
In regal glory on each cove and bay,
And untamed nature reigned along the strand
Where silver ripples play on golden sand.

At last, established in his lordly hall,
Quebec strong-bastioned, safe from fear or fall,
And nobly mirrored on St. Lawrence's tide,
A glowing picture of old Gallic pride—
Brave Lord Montmagny would with Mohawk treat,
And peace, long purposed, in good faith complete,
While far the banners of the Cross advance
With glowing ensigns of imperial France.

But who the peril of the task might dare,
And 'mid deep forests and strange waters fare,
To meet the Mohawk 'neath "The Great Pine Tree,
Where rolls the river to the distant sea?
A Father, gentle, yet above all fear,
The mission ventures as to Christ most dear,
And Jogues, the holy, in His Name, leads forth
A peace embassy from the warlike North.

With good Jean Bourdon, skilled in useful art,
 And strong Algonquins brave to act their part,
 The Father journeys on his devious way,
 Now west, now southward as the rude course lay,
 'Mid moor and mountain, flood and forest dim,
 • Each labor light'ning with some holy hymn,
 And fresh strength gaining by his humble prayer
 Borne up by angels on the trembling air.

At last they paddle in their swift canoe
 O'er Champlain, shining a fair sea of blue,
 Till, gladly landing on its southern marge,
 They leave behind them their light, birchen barge.
 Then, marching cautious on the Indian trail
 Through dusky wildwood and stern, rugged dale,
 They view the ledges where, as years advance,
 Ticonderoga stands, the pride of France,
 A frowning fortress rising o'er the plain,
 That Abercrombie, strong, assaults in vain ;
 And hear *Carrillon*, a resounding chime,
 That woke the forest in primeval time.

'Twas eve in summer, e'en the splendid eve
 Of *Corpus Christi*, when at last they leave
 The tangled forest, and exhausted reach
 A cliff, o'erhanging a bright golden beach,
 And view before them the enchanting scene
 That shone resplendent in the sunset sheen.
 They mark the water with its emerald marge,
 Each island crimson as some blood-stained targe;
 They scan the cedars, now tall, burnished spires,
 Aflame, yet scatheless, wrapped in verdant fires;
 While ev'ry object round the lake below
 Reveals the splendor of the evening glow.

Then first these waters met the white man's gaze.
 Their crystal flashing in the golden rays ;
 And while the Father scanned the glassy lake,
 Its face unruffled by the loon's long wake,

He bade the savage say what name their tongue
Gave to this wonder, all unknown, unsung :
No answer pulsates on the evening air,
No name Algonquin had for scene so fair.

Soon fades the splendor of departing day,
Retreating softly on its western way,
Yet Jogues stands gazing, by a sweet spell bound,
As one who lingers on some holy ground,
All fair words phrasing to express the name
He fain would marry to its future fame ;
Until, admonished by Jean Bourdon's voice,
He turns of camp-grounds to make known his choice.
Thus 'neath the shelter of a lichened ledge
That rose abruptly near the water's edge,
Where arching branches oped to starry light,
He laid his knapsack and prepared for night.

Calm by the camp-fire, when long fast was o'er,
The Father lingered in deep thought to pore
His sacred missal with illumined page,
Well worn by service and bedimmed by age,
Each ruddy rubric, erst its rich attire,
Now pale and ashen like his dying fire.
At last the Envoy closed the treasured tome,
In thought reverting to his childhood's home,
'Mid vine-clad valleys of dear, sunny France,
Where on the greensward, with a merry dance
The peasant closes the departing day,
Or gives the twilight to some rustic play,
'Till from tall towers of quaint Norman times
The sweet bells sounding their clear, silvern chimes,
Invite the aged with the young and fair
To intoned Angelus or Compline prayer ;
Which service rendered with a holy zest,
The happy village sinks in peace to rest.

Thus mused the Father, and anon he sees
Old Orleans' minster 'mong its ancient trees ;

Again the choir in grand billows heave
 Exultant anthems for this honored eve
 Of *Corpus Christi*, when the canons call
 The joyous faithful to the festival ;
 Adoring, chaliced, Christ's dear blood once shed,
 And 'neath the wafer of unleavened bread
 The body broken on the cruel tree,
 To save frail mortals from the Law's decree.
 As in his boyhood, 'mid the rev'rent throng,
 He hears the organ and the swelling song.
 And bows adoring as the sacring bell
 Sheds through the minster its sweet mystic spell,
 Nor doubts the Presence that the rites imply,
 And shadow broadly to believing eye ;
 Again, low kneeling, as the rubric saith,
 He sees the symbol of his Holy Faith,
 And where the Curé with the monstrance trod

He marks the Presence of the very God.
 Thus mused the Father till his weary brows
 Sink rudely pillowed on a bed of boughs,
 Then 'neath the roof-tree of the star-gemmed sky,
 Whence bright Arcturus casts a warder's eye,
 He knew the solace of that tranquil sleep
 By king ne'er tasted in his moated keep.

At morn, uprising from his bed of larch,
 He strapped his wallet for his southward march ;
 But first devoutly said a humble prayer,
 That upward mounted on the sweet June air,
 While nimble echoes far the suffrage toss,
 Around the summit of the rustic cross
 Reared by the Father and a tawny guide,
 Who knelt all rev'rent by the Black Robe's side,
 A simple Savage, yet would gladly pay
 To Christ due worship on this festal day ;
 And thus the Father to his sober sight
 Brought cup and paten for the sacred rite,

Observed the Office, but ere south he went,
Named these fair waters, "Lake Saint Sacrament."
By toilsome stages to the Mohawk land
The Father journeyed with his peaceful band ;
Each wily red man, hailed as willing friend,
Where firm but stainless his due footsteps tend.

In solemn council the proud Mohawks meet
Montmagny's Envoy at their chosen seat ;
Jogues' late tormentor framing crafty phrase
To blunt remembrance of past cruel days ;
For though implacable and black at heart,
The astute savage blandly plays his part ;
Accepting gladly each enameled bead ;
Assuring friendship, if in time of need
A weary Frenchman should demand relief
Within the borders of a Mohawk chief ;
Nor dreamed the Father that himself would be
The first great victim of dread treachery.
The council ended, the decision learned,
With pledge of friendship the doomed Envoy turned,
And marching northward with a high content,
Arrived, full weary, at Saint Sacrament.

Afar now ranging, his Algonquin guide,
Finds in the forest, clad in pristine pride,
A royal birch tree of superior mark,
Its huge trunk gleaming in fair silver bark :
One long incision with the cruel knife
Robs the fair monarch of his robe and life.
A slender framework next he built alike
The bony structure of the greedy pike,
And deftly toiling on the shining strand,
With osier ready for his cunning hand,
He binds each stanchion and each knee ties fast,
The mid-rib lashing to the gunwale last.
The bark then treated with persuasive skill
He renders pliant to his subtle will,

And, slowly yielding to his savage strength,
Around the framework it is drawn at length;
When, clinging firmly to its graceful side,
With elm-tree fibre it is firmly tied,
Each fissure sealing with gum pure as dew,
And thus the red man builds his fair canoe.
Next, all impatient, he would launch away
To test its merits on yon shining bay;
Yet ere embarking o'er the lake to dash,
He carves a paddle from the supple ash.

At length the water wins its new-found bride,
In beauty floating on the brilliant tide,
The proud Algonquin stepping safe on board,
In conscious power, as some feudal lord,
And bears him stately with an honest pride,
The able builder would not deign to hide :—
Poised on his paddle, like some Eastern bonze
He stands the image of his God in bronze.
But while thus posing, his keen eyes aglow,
Caught the bright picture of himself below,
Where, full reflected in the crystal wave,
With all his trappings stood the splendid brave :—
Thrilled with a vanity his face confessed,
He plunged his paddle in the phantom's breast,
And, deftly balancing the light canoe,
With graceful motion o'er the water flew.

Meanwhile the Father, who no skilful hand
For savage labor could at will command,
Mused 'mid the forest, where the solemn shade
With weird enchantment his slow footsteps stayed;
Or read his Office 'neath the oak's gnarled form,
And said his Paters where the summer's storm,
Advancing swiftly in its angry march,
Smote dead the branches of the graceful larch;
While lightnings, flashing in the whirlwind's line,
Consumed the verdure of the plumed pine.

But now white cloudlets float in peace at will,
The mute air list'ning to the tiny rill,
That, cautious, ventures from a tinkling nook
To join the water of a pearly brook,
Which, singing, joyous in its beauty went
To lend its crystal to Saint Sacrament.

Thus roaming, pensive, on the Indian trail,
He heard the echo of the loon's lone wail,
Saw chatting squirrels climb from branch to branch,
Or bird-like, daring on the air to launch ;
While 'mid the thicket rose the antlered deer,
His soft eye flashing with a needless fear,
And from the eyrie, 'mong the crags on high,
Through dizzy tree-tops came the eagle's cry ;
Again, emerging from the sombre shade,
He seeks the sunlight of the grassy glade,
Where, by the margin, he now clearly views
The Indians toiling at the bark canoes,
Broad scan the waters of the sleeping lake,
And mark the mountains where they softly break
In serried order 'gainst the azure sky,
Or veil their summits from the wishful eye.

At last a third day to its end has run,
And, with the rising of the morrow's sun,
Embarking, thankful, they glide smoothly forth
O'er calm Saint Sacrament and journey north.
Thus first a Black Robe his lithe paddle laves
Beneath the surface of these crystal waves,
Sails past the border of each verdant isle,
Or seeks the shelter of some cliff's tall pile ;
And all the windings of the lake explores
Free-ranging safely to its farthest shores.

Thus fared they onward till the day was done,
And purple glories from the setting sun,
Flashed through the gorges of the mountain chain,
While, 'midst the gloaming of the haze, they strain

The weary paddle on the lake's last reach,
To gain the margin of the golden beach,
And build the camp-fire ere again they leave
The spot selected *Corpus Christi* Eve;
Illuming woodland with the festal light
The faithful kindle for midsummer night.
Here while the evening hastens swiftly by,
And night bejewels the blue summer sky,
Once more the Father stays beneath the ledge
Which rose in mid-air near the water's edge,
Close by the hillock whence at first he saw
These waters rippling on the circling shore;
And whence, far southward, heavy laden went
Around the border of Saint Sacrament.

Again his lodging he prepares for night,
And, thoughtful, muses by the fire's red light,
Talks of the journey with his savage guide,
Whose skill the forest has so often tried,
Lists to the legends that the red men tell,
Of sprites that linger round each rock and fell,
Or haunt the recess of the wood and take
Their merry pastime on the sparkling lake.
He hears Jean Bourdon, whose strategic eye
Ranged o'er the region both afar and nigh,
Discerning stations with a soldier's glance
For future castles of imperial France.
Long with the savant the good priest conferred,
With pious patience each opinion heard;
How, 'gainst the English, these fair waters held,
The French possessions would to oneness weld,
And close all access to an open door
The foe might enter in a time of war;
Till growing weary, as the hour grew late,
Of treaty, fortress and affair of state,
He spread his blanket, then low breathed a prayer,
Reposing calmly in the summer air.

Swift flew the night-watch as the Frenchmen slept,
While red flames slowly 'mong the firelogs crept ;
Nought broke the stillness of the lake or hill,
Save the lone wailing of the whippoorwill,
Whose notes so plaintive, as the calm night wore,
Slow floated, dying, to the farthest shore.

At last the fire-fly folds its phosphor wing
And Saturn, paling, hides his mighty ring,
While starry watchers of the radiant skies
In slow succession veil their holy eyes.
Then morn in beauty soft begins to break,
In sweet effulgence o'er the glassy lake,
While, fresh from covert, larks begin their lay,
Of joyous welcome for the rosy day,
The Jesuit rises from his leafy couch
And compact buckles his impervious pouch ;
Then, humbly kneeling on the red-lipped moss,
Beneath the shadow of the greenwood Cross,
His simple cortège as accustomed raise
Their prayer, sent upward with a hymn of praise.
The Matins ended with a simple zeal,
Each takes his portion of the morning meal ;
When Bourdon enters on the dusky trail,
That leads the wanderer o'er the intervalle,
And winds through mazes past the chiming fall,
Below whose rapids the wild surges brawl,
Or 'mid huge boulders, hoarsely-voiced, complain,
Gored in the passage down to proud Champlain ;
While agile red men their light boats upbore,
Safe to the margin of the distant shore :
There, reembarking, they must breast anew
The heaving billows in the swift canoe.

The Father tarried by the camp-fire last,
And parting glances o'er the fair lake cast.
Apocalyptic, it serenely shone,
As that John pictured, calm, before the Throne,

16 *FATHER JOGUES AT THE LAKE OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT.*

Its wondrous beauty with pure crystal blent
To win the guerdon of "Saint Sacrament :"
But, going, kens not that a day is nigh,
When grander vision will salute his eye,
The vision promised to the soul renowned
Who walks in Paradise a martyr crowned :
His bark is waiting for Quebec at noon,
Urbs Zion mystica will claim him soon.



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